

European Commission Green Public Procurement
(GPP) Training Toolkit
- Module 1: Managing GPP Implementation



Green Public Procurement and the European Ecolabel

Fact sheet

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1 How can ecolabels help in GPP?

1.1. Developing environmental criteria for tendering

One of the common challenges facing public procurers in implementing GPP is knowing which environmental criteria to use, as procurers will not typically have expertise in this area.

Independent ecolabels such as the European Ecolabel provide an excellent source for finding criteria. The environmental criteria underpinning independent ecolabels have been developed based on solid scientific evidence and in co-operation with all relevant stakeholders. These criteria can be inserted directly into tendering documents (see more on how to do this in section 2).

1.2. Verifying the environmental performance of products

Another challenge for public procurers is how to verify that products actually meet the environmental criteria which have been included in tendering. It may prove complicated and time-consuming for procurers to study technical documentation on environmental performance – particularly as this will not likely be their area of expertise.

As long as the environmental criteria set are the same (or lower) than those underlying an ecolabel, then if a product carries this ecolabel this is a simple and reliable way for the procurer to check compliance.

2 How does it work in practice? The legal framework

Under EU procurement law¹ ecolabels may be used in public procurement – both as a source for environmental criteria for specifications or the award phase, and as a form of verification - providing a number of conditions are met:

- You are not allowed to demand that a product carries an ecolabel; you may only indicate that the criteria underpinning a certain ecolabel are met, and that it may be used as one form of proof of compliance
- You may only use the ecolabel criteria which can legally be used in public procurement – i.e. only criteria which refer to characteristics of the product or service itself or production processes, not those relating to the general management of the company

¹ Directive 2004/18/EC on the coordination of procedures for the award of public works contracts, public supply contracts and public services contracts, and Directive 2004/17/EC coordinating the procurement procedures of entities operating in the water, energy, transport and postal services sectors



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- You may only refer to ecolabels which themselves meet a number of requirements (the “Type I ecolabels referred to in section 3 meet these criteria):
 - The requirements for the label are based on scientific information
 - The ecolabels are adopted with the participation of all stakeholders, such as government bodies, consumers, manufacturers, distributors and environmental organisations (the “Type I ecolabels referred to in section 3 meet these criteria)
 - They are accessible to all interested parties

Table 1. Using the European Ecolabel in GPP		
	Right	Wrong
Specification	<i>All offered cleaning products must meet the ecological criteria of the European Ecolabel</i>	<i>All offered cleaning products must carry the European Ecolabel</i>
Verification	<i>Products carrying the European Ecolabel will be deemed to comply. Any other appropriate means of proof will also be accepted, such as a technical dossier of the manufacturer or a test report from a recognised body.</i>	<i>The product must carry the European Ecolabel</i>
Award Criteria	<i>Additional points will be awarded to products that meet the ecological criteria of the European Ecolabel</i>	<i>Additional points will be awarded to products that carry the European Ecolabel</i>

3 Which ecolabel to use?

3.1. Public, multi-criteria ecolabels (Type I, ISO 14024)

These are the most common types of labels and also the most commonly used in green procurement. They are based on a number of pass/fail criteria that set the standard for the label in question. Different sets of criteria are established for each product or service group covered by the scheme. These criteria will normally define the environmental performance that the product must reach and may also set standards.

Examples include:

- The European Ecolabel: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/index_en.htm (Annex I lists the product and service groups covered)
- The Nordic Swan, Scandinavia: www.svanen.nu
- The Blue Angel (Blauer Engel), Germany: www.blauer-engel.de
- Umweltzeichen, Austria: www.umweltzeichen.at



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- NF Environment, France: www.marque-nf.com
- Milieukeur, the Netherlands: www.milieukeur.nl
- AENOR, Spain: www.aenor.es
- A list of further ecolabelling schemes can also be obtained at the web site of the Global Eco-labelling Network (GEN) www.gen.gr.jp/product.html

3.2. Public, single-issue labels

Single-issue labels are labels that relate to one particular environmental issue like energy use or emission levels. There are two different types of single-issue labels.

The first type is based on one or more pass/fail criteria linked to a specific issue, e.g. energy efficiency. If a product meets those criteria, then it may display the label. Examples of this type of label are the EU organic label or the ‘Energy star’ label for office equipment.

The second type of label works by grading products or services according to their environmental performance on the issue in question. Examples of the second type include the EU energy label, which grades household goods according to their energy efficiency, with A++ as the most efficient and G as the least efficient.

Single-issue labels can be very useful if you are following a step-by-step approach to greening procurement because they allow for gradual improvement. Using energy efficiency standards would be an excellent first step towards a wider green purchasing programme. The different grades allow you to decide easily how far you want to go.

3.3. Private labels

In addition to the major public labels, there are a number of private labels, run by NGOs, industry groups, or combinations of stakeholders. These include labels on forestry certification schemes, such as the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council)² or PEFC (Pan European Forest Certification Council)³ schemes, organic labels such as the IFOAM⁴ scheme, or multiple-criteria labels such as the Swedish label ‘Bra Miljöval’⁵.

Depending on their accessibility and the way they are adopted these labelling schemes may or may not conform to the guidelines on appropriate environmental labels for public procurement as set out above.

² www.fsc.org

³ www.pefc.org

⁴ www.ifoam.org

⁵ www.snf.se/bmv/english.cfm



Annex I: Product and service groups covered by the European Ecolabel

Full criteria available at: ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/index_en.htm

1. Cleaning Products

- All purpose cleaners and cleaners for sanitary facilities
- Detergents for dishwashers (under revision)
- Hand dishwashing detergents
- Laundry detergents (under revision)
- Soaps and shampoos

2. Appliances

- Dishwashers
- Heat pumps
- Light bulbs
- Personal computers
- Portable computers
- Refrigerators
- Televisions (under revision)
- Vacuum cleaners
- Washing machines

3. Paper Products

- Copying and graphic paper (under revision)
- Printed paper (under revision)
- Tissue paper (under revision)

4. Home and garden

- Bed mattresses (under revision)
- Wooden Furniture (under development)
- Hard and soft floor coverings (under revision)
- Indoor paints and varnishes (under revision)
- Soil improvers and growing media
- Textile products (under revision)

5. Clothing

- Footwear (under revision)
- Textile products (under revision)

6. Tourism

- Camp Site service
- Tourist accommodation service (under revision)

7. Lubricants

- Lubricants